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BILLS FAIL LS TEST

'WRATH OF WOMEN' LOOMS AS LOSS BY 298:230 DRAWS BATTLE LINES

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

THE battle over the women's reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha on Friday went far beyond the arithmetic of 298 votes in favour and 230 against. It unfolded as a tightly calibrated political contest over narrative, constituency-building, and the future architecture of representation, with the government invoking the "wrath of women" in the 2029 Lok Sabha elections and beyond, and the Opposition warning that the measure masked a larger attempt to redraw India's electoral map.

For the BJP-led government, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 was not merely a legislative proposal but an electoral statement. Hours before the vote, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed directly to MPs, urging them to rise above partisan divides.

Home minister Amit Shah amplified the political framing, explicitly positioning women as a decisive electoral constituency that could shape outcomes across multiple election cycles. Warning of sustained political consequences, he said Opposition parties would face the "wrath of women" not only in the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, but "at every level, in every election, and at every place," signalling an attempt to convert women's reservation into a durable political theme anchored in the BJP's governance narrative and Modi's personal popularity among women voters.

Conscience vote call

"Please reflect upon your conscience, remembering the women in your own families... Let us ensure that the women, who are half of the nation's population, receive their rightful due," Modi appealed.

Shah directly named the Congress, DMK, TMC, and other Opposition parties, linking their resistance to the upcoming electoral battles. The subtext: resistance would be framed as opposition to women's empowerment, with the BJP seeking to consolidate women as a cross-cutting constituency cutting across caste and region.

The government's argument rested on two assertions — that women's quota is inseparable from delimitation for its early rollout, and that concerns about regional imbalance, particularly fears of the South losing representation, are misplaced. Shah sought to neutralise that anxiety, insisting that representation would not decline and that "no state will face a loss of seats," positioning delimitation as a much needed structural correction.

The Opposition, however, rejected the premise entirely. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi described the bill as a structural redesign masked as reform. The Opposition positioned itself not against women's reservation, but against what it described as its "sequencing design". By the time the bill failed to secure a two-thirds majority, it had already taken on a dual life. For the government, it was a forward-looking attempt to build a long-term narrative centred on women. For the Opposition, it became a rare point of convergence, an issue framed not as rejection of women's reservation, but as resistance to the design of delimitation itself.

Hectic parleys and discreet messages

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

HECTIC parleys and discreet back channel negotiations preceded the crucial vote. With the odds stacked against it, the NDA tasked BJP leaders who enjoy personal rapport with Opposition leaders with mustering support for the bill.

As for the Opposition, senior Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi worked the phones to ensure Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress aligns with the Opposition's stand on the bill. Sources said Rahul spoke to TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee, while Kharge called up Mamata.

According to BJP sources, senior leaders were roped in to beat the numbers game in the Lok Sabha. Ministers and senior BJP leaders, along with leaders of other NDA allies, were in touch with Opposition parties, albeit in a discreet manner. Within NDA, several rounds of strategic meetings were held to see if the voting could yield the desired results. Sources said senior leaders J P Nadda and Rajnath Singh were also involved in talks with Opposition parties.

Hours before the voting on Friday, it became evident that the NDA's collective efforts to overcome the Opposition's numerical strength would not succeed. However, NDA continued to work behind the scenes to win support through other means, including cross-voting.

Soon after the voting, NDA leaders met to deliberate on the post-vote strategy. The meeting, also attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, decided to target the Opposition parties for their "anti-women" stance, sources said. Another NDA meeting is scheduled on Saturday, followed by a Cabinet meeting at 11.30 am, sources said.

PIC: PTI

An attempt to change electoral map: Rahul

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

THE Constitution amendment bill has nothing to do with women's reservation but is an attempt to change India's electoral map so that the BJP can retain power forever, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Friday said.

Participating in the debate in Lok Sabha, he said the proposal does not address women's empowerment and called it a "shameful act".

He said the opposition supports women's reservation, but not in this manner. "We will help pass it for implementation from this very moment. What is being presented now as the women's bill is something else, and the truth about it needs to be told."

He also took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi using an anecdote about a magic show he watched as a child, drawing strong protests from BJP MPs. Defence minister Rajnath Singh said Rahul must apologise. P9

MLA Kulkarni, 15 others get life term

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

FORMER minister and Congress MLA from the Dharwad constituency Vinay Kulkarni and 15 others were sentenced to life imprisonment in the 2016 murder of zilla panchayat member Yogesh Goudar. Another convict, police inspector Channakeshava B Tingarikar, was sentenced to seven-year imprisonment by the special court on Friday. On Wednesday, the special court for sitting and former MPs and MLAs had convicted 17 accused on charges of murder, criminal conspiracy, destruction of evidence and other offences. P4

9 of family burnt alive as car hits bus

RAMAKRISHNA BADSESHI
@ Kalaburagi/Yadgir

NINE persons of a family were charred to death, while a child survived with critical injuries when the car in which they were travelling crashed into a private bus near Shantpur Cross of Shorapur taluk (Surpur) of Yadgir district on Friday.

Yadgir SP Pruthvik Shankar said 10 people -- five adults and five children, including a one-and-a-half-year-old kid -- were travelling in a Kia Sonnet car. All the occupants of the car, except a ten-year-old, died. The deceased were from Sirwar town of Raichur district. They were returning home after visiting Venugopala Swamy temple at Shorapur. P7

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More Than 95% (570)	498
More Than 90% (540)	1137
More Than 85% (510)	1425
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